أبو حنيفة

THE LEGACY OF IMAM AL-A'ZAM ABU HANIFAH

INTELLECTUAL INDEPENDENCE AND THE PURSUIT OF TRUTH

DR YUSOF MUTAHAR

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This work presents an analysis of Imam Abu Hanifah's life and jurisprudence based on the independent research of Dr. Yusof Mutahar.

بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

اَللّٰهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِ سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ

O Allah, bestow peace and blessings upon our Master Muhammad and upon the family of our Master Muhammad ﷺ

Dedication

This work is humbly dedicated to the memory and enduring legacies of the giants upon whose shoulders we stand:

To **Imam al-A'zam Abū Ḥanīfah**, the Master of Analogical Reasoning, whose uncompromising intellectual independence and unwavering commitment to truth laid the bedrock of our jurisprudential tradition;

To **Imam Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī**, the Architect of Islamic Creed, who harmonized reason and revelation to safeguard the theological orthodoxy of the Ummah;

To Shaykh al-Islam, **Imam Muhammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī,** whose profound guidance, spiritual rectitude, and preservation of sacred knowledge remain a guiding light for my path;

And to my maternal uncle, scholar, and mentor, **Dato Professor Mohammad Hashim Kamali** whose lifelong devotion to the principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*Usul al-Fiqh*) and unmatched intellectual rigor inspired the pursuit of truth within these pages.

"If you were to threaten to drown me in the Euphrates unless I accept this office, I would choose to drown. I am not fit for it, for if I were to judge according to my own independent judgment, I would be unsafe from your displeasure; and if I were to judge according to your desire, my religion would be ruined."

— Imam al-A'zam Abū Ḥanīfah

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Chapter One

Imam al-Aʿẓam Abu Hanifah: The Scholar Who Chose Freedom

Among the towering figures of Islamic intellectual history, few have exercised an influence as profound and enduring as Imam al-Aʿẓam Abu Hanifah al-Nuʿman ibn Thabit (80–150 AH / 699–767 CE). Revered as the *Imām al-Aʿẓam* and the fountainhead of our legal tradition, his foundational methodology shaped not only the structural development of Sunni *fiqh* but also the intellectual and spiritual character of the Ummah for over thirteen centuries. Yet to understand the Imam merely as a brilliant jurist is to overlook the essential spiritual engine of his life. Before his mastery of *qiyās* (analogical reasoning) became the benchmark of legal science, he was an established merchant in Kufah, specializing in the trade of raw silk (*khazz*). This commercial self-sufficiency afforded him something far more valuable than material prosperity: a profound state of *ghinā al-nafs* (contentment of the soul) and the complete freedom to pursue and teach sacred knowledge entirely unconstrained by political authority or institutional patronage.

This aspect of the Imam's life is often mentioned only in passing within standard biographical works, yet within the internal *Manāqib* (virtues) literature of the Hanafi school, it is understood as a deliberate ethical stance. His occupation as a merchant was never separate from his scholarly vocation. Rather, it created the practical, clean conditions that enabled him to devote himself to *ijtihād* (independent legal reasoning) while remaining financially detached from the Umayyad and Abbasid courts. His livelihood was earned through meticulous honesty in trade—often sacrificing his own profits to ensure absolute transparency in transactions—allowing his legal rulings to remain pristine, untouched by the expectations of political office or the subtle psychological weight of financial obligation.

Our tradition has never regarded honest commerce and the preservation of sacred law as competing pursuits. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ himself conducted trade before the commencement of revelation, and many of the Noble Companions combined commercial activity with the transmission of knowledge. Within this prophetic paradigm, Imam Abu Hanifah's commercial success was an act of *wara‘* (scrupulous piety); it was the worldly means by which Allah protected the integrity of the school of *Ahl al-Ra’y* (the jurists of reasoned analysis). His financial independence preserved his *‘iffah* (scholarly dignity). That dignity would soon face its ultimate test.

As his reputation for unmatched jurisprudence and absolute integrity grew, the ruling establishment sought to co-opt his moral authority to legitimize their own governance.
More than once, he was offered the highest judicial appointments, including the powerful office of Chief Judge (*Qāḍī al-Quḍāt*). Within the frameworks of *Usul al-Fiqh*, the judiciary is recognized as a *Farḍ Kifāyah* (communal obligation), and Islamic history records many righteous judges whose service protected the weak. However, the Imam recognized that under the systemic corruption of the prevailing rulers, accepting a state appointment would weaponize his verdicts. A judge bound to the state would inevitably find his pen pressured to legitimize state coercion.

His refusal was not a quiet withdrawal from public duty, but a defiant defense of the autonomy of sacred law. When pressured and threatened by the Abbasid Caliph Al-Mansur to capitulate and accept the state judiciary, the Imam delivered his definitive manifesto on scholarly independence:

"**If you were to threaten to drown me in the Euphrates unless I accept this office, I would choose to drown. I am not fit for it, for if I were to judge according to my own independent judgment, I would be unsafe from your displeasure; and if I were to judge according to your desire, my religion would be ruined.**"
— Imam al-A‘zam Abū Ḥanīfah

He paid for this fidelity in blood. Historical sources and early Hanafi chronicles relate that the Imam endured severe public lashings and prolonged imprisonment in Baghdad for his refusal to surrender his judicial autonomy. Many classical scholars and historians regard his eventual death in prison as a literal state of *shahādah* (martyrdom). Whether viewed through the precise records of history or the devotional accounts of his students, the central lesson remains unyielding: the Imam willingly traded physical comfort, worldly prestige, and his own safety to ensure that the legal school bearing his name remained accountable solely to the Divine.

It is this moral courage, even more than his peerless legal brilliance, that explains why generations of believers came to revere him as *Imam al-Aʿẓam*—the Greatest Imam. His authority was not derived from a royal decree or a palace appointment, but from an unwavering fidelity to principle. His scholarship carried weight because the Ummah trusted his motives. His legal reasoning commanded respect because it was visibly free from worldly coercion.

For the contemporary student of the Hanafi tradition, this legacy of independence must never be romanticized as mere individualism. It was a profound manifestation of *amānah* (divine trust). In the framework of the Imam, intellectual freedom was not the liberty to follow personal whim; it was the hard-fought freedom to remain bound strictly by the Qur'an, the Sunnah, sound systemic reasoning, and an acute consciousness of Allah. By preserving his independence, he ensured that jurisprudence remained a shield for the people, rather than a weapon for the state. This is the true spirit of the Hanafi school—a legacy where truth must always remain greater than position, reputation, or worldly recognition.

Chapter Two

Knowledge as an Amānah: The Scholar's First Allegiance

The life and ultimate sacrifice of Imam al-Aʿẓam Abu Hanifah raise a profound question that extends far beyond the socio-political circumstances of eighth-century Iraq. Why would an elite scholar willingly refuse state honour, systemic influence, wealth, and unchecked political authority when these very opportunities might have allowed him to achieve even greater public prominence? Why endure torture and solitary imprisonment rather than accept an office that many regarded as the pinnacle of scholarly achievement?

The answer does not lie in political defiance, but in the foundational Islamic understanding of knowledge itself.

Within the epistemological framework of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, sacred knowledge (*ʿilm*) is never presented merely as a secular intellectual achievement, a rhetorical skill, or a mechanism for personal advancement. It is an *amānah*—a sacred, heavy trust bestowed by Allah upon the hearts of those whom He chooses to instruct. The true scholar is therefore never the sovereign owner of knowledge, but its temporary custodian (*amīn*), divine-ordered to preserve it faithfully, protect it from distortion, and transmit it honestly to future generations.

This deep sense of stewardship is woven into the very definition of jurisprudence established by our school. Imam al-Aʿẓam Abu Hanifah famously defined *fiqh* not as mere mental gymnastics over legal mechanics, but as *"the soul's deep awareness of its rights and its responsibilities"* (*maʿrifat al-nafs mā lahā wa mā ʿalayhā*). In this paradigm, *ʿilm* is intrinsically tied to ethical obligation. If knowledge is an *amānah*, it cannot be synthetically moulded or structurally altered to satisfy political interests, personal ambitions, fiscal

incentives, or shifting public popularity. The scholar's ultimate allegiance must remain unyieldingly with the Divine Legislator (*al-Shāriʿ*), His revelation, and the objective pursuit of truth. Every other loyalty, however legitimate in its own subordinate sphere, remains entirely secondary.

The Qur'an repeatedly warns the believers that absolute truth must never be compromised or traded for fleeting worldly considerations. Allah commands:

"**And do not mix the truth with falsehood, nor conceal the truth while you know.**"
— *Surah al-Baqarah, 2:42*

Elsewhere, the Divine Decree establishes the absolute framework for intellectual and moral independence:

"**O you who believe! Stand firmly for justice as witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves, your parents, or your close relatives.**"
— *Surah al-Nisā', 4:135*

These verses establish an enduring, unchallengeable ethical principle. The believer is commanded to bear witness to the truth regardless of the personal, domestic, or political consequences. For the scholar, whose explicit vocation is the preservation and articulation of revelation, this responsibility carries an even greater ontological weight. The pen entrusted with explaining the words of Allah and the traditions of His Messenger ﷺ must never become captive to fear (*khawf*), political favour, or calculated worldly opportunism.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ likewise delivered stern warnings against the weaponisation or commercialisation of sacred knowledge, highlighting that it should never be pursued as a means of attaining social status or material gain. He said:

"**Whoever seeks knowledge that should be sought for the sake of Allah, but learns it only to obtain some worldly benefit, will not smell the fragrance of Paradise on the Day of Resurrection.**"
— *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*

This warning concerns the purity of intention (*ikhlāṣ*) before anything else. It is a matter of the heart. The Hanafi tradition does not structurally condemn wealth, commercial employment, or public institutional service. Indeed, the narrative history of our school is rich with diverse expressions of this trust.

One needs look no further than Imam Abu Hanifah's greatest student and companion, Imam Abu Yusuf. Unlike his teacher, Imam Abu Yusuf accepted the office of Chief Judge (*Qāḍī al-Quḍāt*) under the Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid. Yet, he maintained his fierce intellectual integrity, utilizing the state infrastructure to institutionalise the Hanafi legal framework and protect the rights of the vulnerable against executive overreach.

What the Qur'an and Sunnah insist upon is not a rejection of society, but an internal state of detachment: that the scholar's heart must never become tethered to worldly validation or state prestige in a way that alters the delivery of truth. This distinction is critical. Islam has never recognised an inherent, structural conflict between institutional scholarship and intellectual integrity. Some of the greatest masters of our tradition taught within celebrated, state-funded madrasahs, advised rulers, and served on judicial benches while maintaining remarkable moral courage and ascetic piety (*waraʿ*). Others, following the explicit methodology of the Great Imam, pursued knowledge entirely outside formal state institutions, maintaining their autonomy through independent trade and private circles. Both paths structurally enriched the Ummah. Both produced giants of learning. The history of Islamic scholarship is far too rich, vast, and multi-layered to be reduced to a single, rigid model.

Rather than presenting these diverse paths as competing or contradictory ideals, it is more accurate from a traditional perspective to understand them as complementary vocations. Allah opens different doors of service for different individuals, preserving His religion through a brilliant diversity of talents, temporal circumstances, and communal responsibilities.

The legacy of Imam Abu Hanifah therefore should never be misinterpreted as a blanket rejection of institutions or public service. His life teaches a far more enduring, universal truth: whatever path or door a scholar is called to follow, their ultimate accountability belongs to Allah alone. Whether lecturing within the walls of a modern university, issuing legal verdicts from a formal bench, instructing circles of students in a local mosque, or writing quietly in creative solitude, the scholar's foundational responsibility remains entirely unchanged—to guard and deliver the *amānah* of knowledge with absolute honesty, profound humility, and unwavering fidelity to the Truth.

Chapter Three

Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi: Independence in the Pursuit of Truth

If Imam al-Aʿẓam Abu Hanifah established one of the greatest legal traditions in Islamic history, it was Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d. 333 AH / 944 CE) who would become one of its foremost theological architects. Living almost two centuries after Imam Abu Hanifah in the scholarly city of Samarqand, Imam al-Maturidi inherited an intellectual landscape profoundly different from that of his predecessor. The Islamic world had expanded dramatically, and with that expansion came new philosophical movements, theological controversies, and sophisticated intellectual challenges that required careful and systematic responses.

The questions confronting Muslim scholars were no longer confined to matters of jurisprudence alone. Debates concerning the Divine Attributes, human free will, revelation, reason, prophecy, and the nature of faith occupied the minds of theologians throughout the Muslim world. Various schools of thought emerged, each attempting to answer these questions according to its own methodological principles. It was within this intellectually vibrant environment that Imam al-Maturidi devoted his life to defending the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah through rigorous scholarship grounded in both revelation and sound reason.

What distinguished Imam al-Maturidi was not merely the conclusions he reached, but the extraordinary care with which he arrived at them. His writings reveal a scholar deeply committed to understanding opposing viewpoints before responding to them. Rather than caricaturing his opponents, he engaged their strongest arguments with remarkable precision, analysing their assumptions before presenting his own evidence from the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and rational inquiry. His method exemplified intellectual confidence without intellectual arrogance.

For Imam al-Maturidi, reason and revelation were never adversaries. Human intellect was itself one of Allah's greatest gifts, created to recognise His signs and to reflect upon His creation. Yet reason was never autonomous; it operated within the guidance of revelation rather than in opposition to it. This balanced methodology became one of the defining characteristics of the Maturidi tradition and would profoundly influence Sunni theology for centuries to come.

Perhaps one of the most remarkable aspects of Imam al-Maturidi's legacy is the patience that characterised his scholarship. He did not pursue fame, cultivate public prominence, or seek political influence. Instead, he devoted himself to careful study, teaching, writing, and reflection. His influence spread not through public spectacle but through the enduring quality of his scholarship. Long after the controversies of his own age had faded, his writings continued to guide successive generations of scholars across Central Asia, the Indian subcontinent, Anatolia, the Balkans, and beyond.

His life offers an important lesson for every generation of scholars. Not every contribution to the Ummah is made from a public platform. Some of the most enduring intellectual achievements emerge from years of patient reading, careful writing, thoughtful revision, and quiet contemplation. Such work often unfolds away from public attention, requiring perseverance rather than visibility. History repeatedly demonstrates that scholarship measured by depth rather than immediacy possesses a unique capacity to endure.

Imam al-Maturidi also reminds us that intellectual independence should never be confused with novelty. Genuine scholarship is not the pursuit of originality for its own sake, nor the desire to distinguish oneself through unconventional opinions. Rather, true independence lies in the disciplined willingness to follow the evidence wherever it leads while remaining firmly rooted in the inherited principles of the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the understanding of the scholars who came before. It requires both courage and

humility: courage to defend the truth when it is challenged, and humility to recognise that every scholar remains a servant of knowledge rather than its master.

The legacy of Imam al-Maturidi therefore complements that of Imam Abu Hanifah in a profound way. Imam Abu Hanifah demonstrated the moral independence necessary to preserve the integrity of legal judgement. Imam al-Maturidi demonstrated the intellectual independence necessary to preserve the integrity of Sunni creed. Together they established a tradition in which scholarship was characterised not by the pursuit of influence or recognition, but by fidelity to revelation, disciplined reasoning, and sincere service to the Ummah.

For later generations, this partnership between the Hanafi school of law and the Maturidi school of theology became far more than an historical association. It represented a shared intellectual ethos—one that valued careful reasoning, rigorous evidence, spiritual humility, and an unwavering commitment to truth. It is this legacy, preserved across more than a millennium of scholarship, that continues to inspire students of knowledge today.

Chapter Four

The Scholar and the Nafs: Humility Before Allah

The greatest challenge confronting a scholar is not always external. Throughout history, Muslim scholars have faced political pressure, imprisonment, exile, poverty, censorship, and opposition. These trials have undoubtedly shaped the course of Islamic intellectual history. Yet the Qur'an and the Sunnah repeatedly direct our attention towards a struggle even more fundamental: the struggle within the human soul itself.

Knowledge possesses a unique ability to elevate a person before Allah, but it also carries the potential to become a source of spiritual destruction if it breeds pride, self-satisfaction, or the illusion of intellectual superiority. For this reason, the earliest scholars consistently viewed the purification of the heart (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) as inseparable from the pursuit of sacred knowledge. A sound intellect alone was never considered sufficient. It had to be accompanied by sincerity (*ikhlas*), humility (*tawadu'*), and a continual awareness of one's dependence upon Allah.

The Qur'an repeatedly reminds believers that no matter how much knowledge they acquire, they remain servants before the Lord of all knowledge. Allah says:

> "**...and above every possessor of knowledge is One more knowing.**"
>
> *(Surah Yusuf, 12:76)*

Likewise, He reminds humanity:

"You have been given only a little knowledge."

(Surah al-Isra', 17:85)

These verses dismantle every claim to intellectual self-sufficiency. However extensive a scholar's learning may become, it remains only a tiny portion of the infinite knowledge possessed by Allah. True scholarship therefore produces humility rather than arrogance. The more deeply one studies, the more profoundly one recognises how much remains unknown.

Perhaps nowhere is this lesson illustrated more beautifully than in the remarkable account of Prophet Musa (peace be upon him) and al-Khidr in Surah al-Kahf.

Prophet Musa (peace be upon him), one of the greatest Messengers of Allah and among those honoured with direct speech from his Lord, was instructed to journey in search of a servant whom Allah had granted a form of knowledge different from his own. During their travels, Musa witnessed actions that appeared, according to his own understanding, to contradict justice and wisdom. Yet each time he questioned them, he discovered that his own knowledge was incomplete. What initially appeared to be wrong concealed a wisdom known only through the knowledge Allah had bestowed upon al-Khidr.

The lesson extends far beyond the historical narrative itself. It teaches that no scholar, regardless of rank or accomplishment, ever reaches a point at which they become independent of learning from others. Intellectual confidence must always be accompanied by intellectual humility. Every student remains a student until the end of life.

For those engaged in religious scholarship, this lesson is especially significant. It is all too easy for admiration from students, publication, public

recognition, or academic achievement to subtly cultivate the belief that one's own conclusions are beyond question or that one's understanding has reached completion. The Qur'anic account of Prophet Musa and al-Khidr stands as a perpetual reminder that Allah alone possesses complete knowledge, while every human being, regardless of learning, sees only part of the picture.

The great scholars of Sunni Islam embodied this humility in remarkable ways. The great Imam Malik famously declared, "Everyone's statement may be accepted or rejected except the occupant of this grave," while pointing towards the resting place of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Imam al-Shafi'i would pray that the truth might emerge through the words of his opponents rather than his own. Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal continued to revise his legal opinions throughout his life whenever stronger evidence became apparent. Their greatness lay not merely in what they knew, but in their willingness to submit completely to the truth wherever it appeared.

This humility also protects the scholar from another subtle danger: confusing service with self-importance. Knowledge is never acquired to establish one's own reputation, but to serve the religion of Allah and benefit His creation. The sincere scholar therefore strives to leave behind ideas rather than a personal legacy, hoping that any benefit found within their work will endure long after their own name has faded from memory.

When this internal orientation shifts, the soul falls victim to the destructive disease of self-righteousness. The moment a researcher or teacher begins to view their intellectual output or independent standing as a badge of personal spiritual superiority, they mirror the foundational characteristic of Iblis. The downfall of Iblis was not a lack of academic or theological knowledge; he possessed immense knowledge and had witnessed the unseen realities of the heavens. Rather, his destruction was entirely rooted in pride (***kibr***) and the absolute illusion of self-importance that led him to declare, *"I am better than*

him." For the scholar, this is the most fatal disease of the heart. To guard the believers against this subtle trap of the ***nafs***, Allah issues a definitive decree in His Book:

"So do not claim purity for yourselves; He knows best who fears Him."
— Surah al-Najm, 53:32

This explicit prohibition reminds the student of knowledge that outward scholastic achievements, extensive authorship, and independent stances mean nothing if the heart is contaminated by self-conceit (ʿ***ujb***). True righteousness is hidden within the soul, known completely and exclusively by Allah. Therefore, weaponizing sacred knowledge to feed a sense of self-righteousness or to look down upon others is an absolute perversion of the ***amānah*** of ʿ***ilm***For this reason, the true measure of scholarship is not found in titles, appointments, public recognition, or the number of books a person writes. It is found in sincerity before Allah, honesty with the evidence, humility before fellow scholars, and a continual willingness to acknowledge one's own limitations. These qualities cannot be conferred by institutions, nor are they guaranteed by independence. They are gifts that Allah grants to those who strive to purify their hearts while seeking His pleasure alone

In the end, the scholar's greatest opponent is rarely another school of thought, another institution, or another researcher. It is the whisper of the nafs that seeks recognition over sincerity, certainty over humility, and reputation over truth. Every generation must therefore wage this struggle anew, remembering that knowledge reaches its perfection only when it is accompanied by reverence for Allah and humility before His creation.

Chapter Five

The Price of Knowledge: A Legacy of Sacrifice

Every generation inherits the vast treasures of Islamic scholarship, yet few pause to consider the heavy sacrifices through which those treasures were preserved. The foundational books of our tradition did not emerge from lives of predictable ease or worldly comfort. They were often penned amidst grinding poverty, political persecution, exile, sudden illness, social turmoil, and severe personal hardship. Behind every enduring work of scholarship stands a human being who consciously chose the pursuit of absolute truth over the pursuit of worldly tranquility.

The life of Imam al-Aʿẓam Abu Hanifah stands as the primary blueprint for this path. His refusal to compromise his legal independence came at an immense personal cost, yet his sacrifice ensured that future generations inherited a legal tradition whose authority rested upon moral integrity rather than royal patronage.

This specific pattern of sacrifice would repeat itself across the centuries. Among the clearest examples is Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 241 AH), whose steadfastness during the *Mihnah* (the Inquisition) remains one of the defining moments of Islamic history. Pressured by successive Abbasid authorities to affirm the unorthodox doctrine that the Qur'an was created, Imam Ahmad resolutely refused to utter what he knew to be false, despite enduring years of harsh imprisonment, public humiliation, and brutal physical floggings. His perseverance was not driven by stubborn obstinacy or political ambition, but by a profound conviction that revealed truth could not be altered to satisfy the transient demands of state authority. His patience became a lasting symbol of moral courage, reminding later generations that genuine scholarship sometimes requires a willingness to suffer physical harm for the sake of preserving the core parameters of the religion.

The sacrifices of our scholars, however, have not always taken the form of state imprisonment or outward physical persecution. At times, the far greater and more agonizing struggle has been entirely internal.

Few figures illustrate this internal battleground more powerfully than *Ḥujjat al-Islām* (The Proof of Islam), Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH). By every measurable worldly standard, al-Ghazali had achieved unparalleled success. He occupied the highly prestigious Nizamiyyah chair of academic learning in Baghdad, lectured to thousands of elite students, enjoyed immense political influence within the Seljuk court, and was universally recognized as the foremost intellectual powerhouse of his age. Yet, amidst this dazzling outward success, he became deeply troubled by the state of his own heart.

In his celebrated autobiographical work, *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl* (Deliverance from Error), Imam al-Ghazali recounts how he came to the terrifying realization that traces of worldly ambition had corrupted his intentions. He feared that the desire for academic reputation, public applause, and institutional prestige had become deeply intertwined with his pursuit of sacred knowledge. Rather than ignore this spiritual crisis, he undertook one of the most remarkable acts of self-renunciation in Islamic history.

Leaving behind his elite position, his wealth, his books, and his public prominence, he quietly slipped out of Baghdad under the guise of making a pilgrimage. He entered a decade-long period of intensive spiritual exile. The grand scholar who once advised viziers stripped himself of all titles; he spent years in Damascus and Jerusalem living in complete anonymity, physically locking himself inside the minaret of the Umayyad Mosque and spending his days sweeping the floors and cleaning the courtyards of the mosques to utterly break his ego.

His withdrawal was never a permanent rejection of public service, but a necessary purification of it. Following years of intense reflection, worship, and disciplined spiritual refinement, he returned to writing with a purified heart, producing masterpieces like the *Ihyā' ʿUlūm al-Dīn* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences) that have nourished the spiritual lives of Muslims for nearly a millennium. His legacy proves that the greatest victories of a scholar are often won not in public debates against rivals, but within the quiet, hidden struggle against the ego.

A parallel lesson in the total transformation of the self can be found in the life of Mawlana Jalal al-Din al-Rumi (d. 672 AH)—with whom the author shares a direct and cherished ancestral lineage. Before becoming globally renowned for his ecstatic spiritual poetry, Rumi was a deeply traditional, high-ranking Hanafi jurist (*faqīh*) and Mufti in Konya, whose mastery of legal scholarship earned him widespread respect throughout Anatolia. He lived a highly structured life as an elite academic professor, surrounded by books and adoring students.

His sudden encounter with the wandering dervish Shams al-Din al-Tabrizi completely shattered this conventional existence. This relationship did not change Rumi's foundational commitment to the external rulings of Islam; rather, it fundamentally transformed the depth of his internal spiritual awareness. Rumi was forced to step down from the academic podium of the professor and enter the fiery furnace of divine love. He realized that formal knowledge, when decoupled from direct spiritual experience, could inadvertently act as a veil for the soul. Through this painful shedding of his academic prestige, Rumi came to recognize that knowledge reaches its highest, truest purpose only when it softens the heart, deepens humility, and burns away the illusion of self-importance.

His subsequent poetry repeatedly warns against attachment to the external self. It calls the seeker to empty the heart of intellectual pride, to completely abandon the illusion of self-sufficiency, and to recognize that true wisdom is

ultimately an unearned gift bestowed by Allah upon a broken spirit. For this reason, Rumi's enduring global influence cannot be explained simply by literary or poetic brilliance. It rests upon the absolute sincerity that breathes through his words, reminding every generation of researchers that academic learning without profound humility remains dangerously incomplete.

Although their temporal circumstances and life paths differed greatly, Imam Abu Hanifah, Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Imam al-Ghazali, and Mawlana Rumi share an unbroken common thread. Each was forced to sacrifice something deeply precious to the worldly ego in order to preserve something infinitely greater for the Ummah. For Imam Abu Hanifah, it was political office and ultimately his physical life. For Imam Ahmad, it was physical comfort and safety. For al-Ghazali, it was his institutional prestige. For Rumi, it was his attachment to outward academic distinction. Their sacrifices were different in manifestation, yet all sprang from the exact same internal conviction: that the pursuit of Allah's pleasure must always take absolute precedence over worldly validation.

This legacy invites every modern student of knowledge to ask a deeply personal, uncomfortable question. *What am I genuinely willing to sacrifice for the sake of truth?*

The practical answer will naturally differ from one individual to another. In our contemporary age, few will be called to endure state imprisonment, face lashings, or physically withdraw to clean the floors of a distant mosque. Yet, every single scholar, teacher, and author will eventually face their own quiet, critical moments in which sincerity is tested against ambition, conviction against convenience, and divine service against raw self-interest.

The history of Islamic scholarship teaches us that these agonizing moments are not interruptions to the scholarly journey; they are the very fire through which it is refined. Knowledge is purified through sacrifice, just as character is stabilized through patient endurance. The enduring authority of our

greatest historical guides was never secured merely by the sheer brilliance of their intellects, but by the unyielding integrity with which they lived and breathed the knowledge they possessed.

Chapter Six

The Continuing Legacy of Independent Scholarship

The illustrative examples of Imam al-Aʿẓam Abu Hanifah, Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi, Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Imam al-Ghazali, and Mawlana Jalal al-Din al-Rumi belong to different centuries, separate lands, and distinct socio-political circumstances. Yet, despite the vast distances of time and space that divide them, they are bound by a singular, unyielding conviction: that the acquisition and transmission of sacred knowledge is ultimately an act of profound ʿ***ibādah*** (worship) long before it is a formal academic pursuit. Their collective lives serve as a perpetual reminder that the preservation of sacred law and creed has always rested upon absolute sincerity, uncompromising intellectual honesty, patient endurance, and an unwavering commitment to the objective pursuit of truth. These foundational principles remain entirely unchanged today.

The contemporary Muslim world currently enjoys unprecedented educational opportunities that previous generations could scarcely have imagined. Modern universities, traditional seminaries (*madāris*), specialized research institutes, expansive digital libraries, online repositories, and global international collaborations have enabled Islamic scholarship to seamlessly reach audiences across every inhabited continent. Never before in human history have so many classical manuscripts been instantaneously accessible to students around the world, nor have researchers possessed such extraordinary structural opportunities to cross-examine ideas across diverse cultures and academic disciplines.

These rapid technological and institutional developments are among the great, visible blessings of our age. They have vastly enriched the field of Islamic studies, salvaged and preserved thousands of deteriorating manuscripts, encouraged critical comparative research, and produced

generations of highly qualified academics who serve the *Ummah* through structured teaching, publication, legal scholarship, and public education. Their vital contributions deserve both our collective gratitude and deepest respect.

At the exact same time, the organic structural diversity that has historically characterized Islamic scholarship continues to flourish. Safely alongside large-scale universities and established institutions remain dedicated scholars whose intellectual work is carried out entirely independently. Like the merchant-scholars, practicing physicians, master craftsmen, and private jurists of the classical Islamic golden age, they contribute to the preservation of sacred knowledge through a different, but equally legitimate, mode of religious service. These contrasting approaches must never be viewed as competing or adversarial models; rather, they exist to structurally complement one another within a unified intellectual framework.

Institutional scholarship provides essential macro-stability, cross-disciplinary collaboration, specialized funding resources, peer engagement, and the highly structured environment necessary for large-scale research and systematic teaching. Independent scholarship, by contrast, offers the unique flexibility to pursue high-risk, long-term intellectual projects whose timelines are measured not by rigid university semesters or external funding cycles, but solely by the immense demands of the subject matter itself. One independent researcher may devote years in isolation to producing a critical edition of a completely forgotten manuscript. Another may dedicate decades to translating a dense classical text into an accessible modern language for future generations. Others bring rare, vital expertise acquired in modern professional fields—such as medicine, law, or philosophy—into a direct, active conversation with the classical Islamic sciences.

History itself demonstrates that Allah preserves His religion precisely through this magnificent diversity of avenues. Some scholars are called to construct enduring institutions, while others are called to leave behind

targeted, monumental books. Some become widely renowned teachers whose massive networks of students carry their legal lineage forward, while others spend the entirety of their earthly lives in relative obscurity, only for their private writings to fundamentally reshape the intellectual landscape generations after their passing. Within the divine calculus, the ultimate measure of scholarly success has never been the specific institutional form of service, but rather the ***ikhlāṣ*** (pure sincerity) with which it is executed and the tangible benefit it brings to the *Ummah*.

This brilliant ecosystem reflects a deeper, intentional divine wisdom. Human beings naturally differ in their individual talents, temporal opportunities, domestic responsibilities, and worldly circumstances. Just as Allah explicitly distributes different forms of material provision (***rizq***) among His servants, He also masterfully distributes diverse opportunities for sacred service. This divine distribution of roles is beautifully captured in the Book of Allah:

"**And it is He who has made you successors upon the earth and has raised some of you above others in degrees [of rank] that He may try you through what He has given you.**"
— Surah al-Anʿām, 6:165

Under this dynamic paradigm, one scholar may uniquely excel in public oratory, another in deep analytical reasoning, another in the tedious preservation of manuscripts, and another in theology, community administration, or leadership. Together, they form a cohesive, self-sustaining intellectual ecosystem in which each distinct path validates and strengthens the work of the other.

Therefore, the enduring contemporary lesson of Imam al-Aʿẓam Abu Hanifah lies not in encouraging modern scholars to artificially mimic the outward, domestic details of his eighth-century life, but rather in preserving the internal ethical principles that guided it. Absolute moral integrity, unyielding ***istiqlāl*** (independence of judgment), profound humility before Allah, total

honesty with textual evidence, and a sincere devotion to the global community are universal values that transcend every historical epoch. They remain just as necessary within the halls of a modern secular university as they do within the walls of a traditional mosque, a research institute, or the quiet, solitary study of an independent researcher.

Ultimately, the future of Islamic scholarship will never be secured by any single institution, methodology, or modern model of learning. It will be preserved, as it always has been across the centuries, through individual men and women of genuine sincerity who selflessly dedicate their intellects, their time, and their lives to the service of Allah and His religion. The external forms of that service may naturally shift with the tides of time, but its ultimate purpose remains eternally unchanged: to guard the sacred ***amānah*** of knowledge and transmit it faithfully to those who come after.

Chapter Seven

Following a Different Path

Every scholar eventually discovers that Allah opens a particular, chosen door through which they are uniquely called to serve the ***Ummah***. Although the ultimate destination remains entirely the same—the rigorous pursuit of beneficial knowledge and the ultimate pleasure of Allah—the distinct paths leading to that destination often differ considerably. Some dedicate their lives to teaching within the formal walls of modern universities and traditional seminaries. Others serve as judges, muftis, community administrators, institutional researchers, or public educators. Each unique path carries its own heavy set of responsibilities, and each has immensely enriched the intellectual landscape of the Muslim world.

My own personal journey gradually led me towards a different, though by no means unprecedented, path.

Throughout my academic life, I have been deeply influenced and inspired by elite scholars whose vital work has flourished within major academic institutions. Among the greatest and most profound of these influences has been my maternal uncle, mentor, and teacher, **Professor Mohammad Hashim Kamali**. His monumental scholarship in Islamic legal theory (***Uṣūl al-Fiqh***), constitutional law, and the higher objectives of the Shari'ah (***Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah***) has fundamentally shaped contemporary Islamic legal thought for decades. His books continue to be studied authoritatively throughout the globe and formed a foundational part of my own early education. Like countless students before me, I have benefited immensely from his vast scholarship and remain deeply grateful for his personal guidance, constant encouragement, and peerless intellectual example. His illustrious career represents a distinguished, pristine model of Islamic

scholarship—rigorous, highly collaborative, institutionally engaged, and internationally respected.

As my own private research matured, however, I gradually recognized that the specific textual work to which I felt most deeply drawn required a completely different environment. My scholarly interests increasingly centered upon the direct translation and textual study of classical Arabic source texts, Qur'anic exegesis (***tafsīr***), Hanafi jurisprudence, Maturidi theology (***kalām***), and the careful, systematic reconstruction of the intellectual heritage of ***Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāʿah***. These are not superficial projects measured in standard academic months or fiscal years, but massive undertakings measured explicitly in decades. They demand a prolonged, solitary engagement with a single text, the repeated cross-examination of numerous ancient manuscripts and commentaries, and an unwavering commitment to a consistent, unyielding scholarly methodology from beginning to end.

It was during the critical, early stages of my work on the ***Tafsīr al-Maturīdī***—a project that commenced in 2020—that I came to fully appreciate just how demanding such a lifelong commitment would become. For five long years, this labor unfolded in complete silence, requiring intense focus, editing, and revision before a single volume was ever ready to be introduced to the public. Translating and commenting upon one of the greatest masterpieces of Sunni Qur'anic exegesis is never a mere linguistic exercise. Every single verse requires a careful, exhaustive consideration of the classical Arabic language, the wider contextual narrative of the Qur'an, the specific theological principles of Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi, the exact legal methodology of the Hanafi school, and the comprehensive explanations of subsequent classical commentators.

As this monumental project expanded into a finished reality eventually encompassing tens of thousands of pages, I realized that preserving absolute

consistency required complete autonomy over its pace, methodology, structural layout, and editorial direction. Large, collaborative institutional projects naturally involve multiple contributors, rotating editorial boards, shifting bureaucratic priorities, rigid publishing schedules, commercial financial considerations, and differing academic expectations. While such models have produced outstanding, vital scholarship throughout Islamic history—and I hold them in the absolute highest regard—I recognized that they were not structurally suited to the highly specific, singular work that Allah had placed directly before my pen.

An independent environment granted me the vital ability to focus entirely on the classical text without having to remain overly cautious about the shifting sensitivities of contemporary readers, commercial publishers, or secular audiences. There was no pressure to dilute or bias the traditional definitions to fit a specific institutional narrative. Furthermore, this absolute structural independence granted me the unique operational freedom to publish massive amounts of research and textual material fluidly, without waiting for the bureaucratic delays or administrative approvals that often slow institutional presses. My greatest responsibility was never to satisfy an academic tenure track, nor to maximize commercial success, but to preserve the absolute, pristine integrity of the traditional voice from the opening verse to the final page. For this specific reason, I chose to remain entirely independent.

This deliberate decision was never intended as a critique of modern universities, commercial publishers, or formal research institutions, nor as a claim that independent scholarship is inherently superior. Islamic civilization has always beautifully flourished through both individual solitary masters and great formal institutions, each serving the ***Ummah*** according to their unique strengths. My decision simply reflected the uncompromising, particular demands of the text to which I had committed my life.
Like Imam al-Aʿẓam Abu Hanifah, whose independent commercial trade allowed him to protect his pen without dependence upon political authority,

Allah blessed me with a profession entirely outside the formal study of theology. My work as a medical practitioner was never pursued to cultivate an image or showcase material standing. Rather, in the quiet reality of this journey, it served as a practical, necessary sacrifice. This profession alone has enabled me to personally absorb and fund the considerable financial costs associated with advanced research, manuscript acquisition, international travel to secure traditional ***ijāzāt***, professional printing, and global digital distribution.

I have never made a single cent of profit from these books; rather, I have gladly poured thousands of my own earnings into their production. My medical career simply served as a practical firewall between the sacred text and the subtle pressures of worldly compromise, ensuring that my livelihood remained completely detached from the transmission of sacred knowledge.

This financial detachment completely shaped my philosophy of publication. Rather than restricting the fruits of my research behind expensive commercial paywalls, academic subscriptions, or institutional barriers, I made the conscious choice to publish my books as entirely open-access resources, freely available to the global ***Ummah***. Knowledge is a sacred ***amānah*** entrusted to those who possess it. If Allah has granted me the independent means to completely remove material barriers between sincere students and beneficial knowledge, then I regard it as both a profound privilege and a religious responsibility to do so. My ultimate hope is that a student sitting in Jakarta, Cairo, Perth, London, or Lagos may benefit from the same classical truths regardless of their financial circumstances.

There is a unique, incomparable tranquility in sitting completely alone with a classical manuscript, an open notebook, and a sharpened pencil, entirely surrounded by the accumulated wisdom of centuries of our righteous predecessors. Hours pass entirely unnoticed while tracing the brilliant legal reasoning of Imam Abu Hanifah, comparing the subtle theological discussions of Imam al-Maturidi, or following a single complex question across generations of Hanafi masters. Much of this intense labor is completely

unseen by the public eye. It attracts no contemporary attention, yields no immediate worldly accolades, and progresses only a few meticulous paragraphs at a time. Yet, it is precisely within this quiet, hidden work that I have found the greatest intellectual fulfillment and spiritual peace.

Scholarship, for me, has never been about public recognition or titles. It has always been about preserving a sacred trust.

If, by Allah's infinite grace and mercy, these works continue to benefit sincere students of knowledge long after I have departed this earthly world, then every single hour spent in quiet, independent study will have been worthwhile.

Chapter Eight

Writing in Service of the Ummah

One of the greatest, most enduring lessons I have learned from a lifelong study of our classical predecessors is that their monumental writings were rarely produced in clinical isolation from the immediate, bleeding needs of their contemporary communities. They did not sit down to write simply to expand a personal bibliography, nor to artificially inflate the number of titles bearing their names. Rather, they authored works because they recognized genuine theological questions, widespread misunderstandings, or existential challenges confronting the ***Ummah***—and they firmly believed those issues deserved careful, principled, and rigorously scholarly answers.

Imam al-Shāfiʿī composed his seminal *Al-Risālah* to establish the foundational principles of legal methodology at a precise historical junction when those parameters required systematic stabilization. Imam al-Ṭaḥāwī authored his *Al-ʿAqīdah al-Ṭaḥāwiyyah* to present the unadulterated creed of ***Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāʿah*** with absolute clarity and precision amidst fracturing sectarian disagreement. Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi devoted the entirety of his earthly life to defending orthodox Sunni belief against the hyper-rationalist currents of his age, not because theological controversy inherently interested him, but because safeguarding the daily creed of ordinary Muslims required careful reasoning firmly rooted in the text of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Their books were never self-serving academic exercises; they were urgent answers to critical questions.

Among all these historical giants, however, it was Imam al-Aʿẓam Abu Hanifah who perhaps demonstrated most clearly that the preservation of Islam required not only a passive knowledge of revelation, but also a highly disciplined methodology capable of dynamically applying that revelation to unfolding realities. While the Qur'an and the Sunnah are eternally complete, perfect, and absolute, every subsequent generation inevitably encounters

complex human circumstances that previous eras could scarcely have imagined. New technologies emerge, medical sciences advance, economic systems evolve, and human societies become increasingly intricate. None of these rapid developments diminish the perfection of revelation; rather, they demand the timeless implementation of a legal methodology that understands exactly how eternal, unchangeable principles can be faithfully applied to shifting temporal circumstances.

The enduring global strength of the Hanafi school lies precisely in this structural adaptability. This brings us to the core of his legal framework: the disciplined use of ***qiyās*** (analogical reasoning), a tool that has frequently been profoundly misunderstood by both his superficial admirers and his harshest critics. Some have mistakenly imagined that ***qiyās*** represents personal, unchecked opinion taking precedence over sacred revelation. Nothing could be further from the historical truth. For the Great Imam, ***qiyās*** never functioned independently of the Qur'an, the Sunnah, consensus (***ijmāʿ***), or the established text of Islamic jurisprudence. Rather, it served as a meticulously regulated, highly scientific method of extending the guidance of revelation to contemporary circumstances for which no explicit, literal textual ruling existed. It was human reason operating explicitly in service of revelation, never in competition with it.

This critical distinction remains just as vital today as it was during the second Islamic century. The contemporary Muslim community currently faces bioethical, technological, and socio-economic questions that could scarcely have been conceived by the earliest generations. Advances in reproductive medicine raise complex questions concerning *in vitro* fertilization, genetic editing, and embryo preservation. Modern transplantation surgery requires careful, deep consideration of organ donation parameters and end-of-life ethics. Artificial intelligence increasingly influences clinical diagnostics, global finance, education, and legal decision-making. Genetic engineering,

decentralized digital commerce, cryptocurrency, and machine learning continually present unprecedented legal and ethical challenges.
None of these modern questions can be answered by a superficial, literal search for explicit historical references. Instead, they require researchers who possess a deep, organic mastery of the objectives of the Shari'ah (***Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah***), the legal maxims established by the classical jurists, and the disciplined methodology through which Imam Abu Hanifah approached the unprecedented. Therefore, the vitality of our school lies not simply in static loyalty to the specific eighth-century legal verdicts of the Imam, but in preserving the exact structural methodology by which those decisions were originally reached.

This core conviction has completely shaped my own life's trajectory as both a medical practitioner and a student of Hanafi jurisprudence. Throughout my clinical medical career, I have repeatedly stood face-to-face with these exact contemporary issues. I have witnessed firsthand the rapid advancements in reproductive technology, complex transplantation medicine, genetics, and artificial intelligence. Each clinical development presents genuine, agonizing ethical questions for Muslim patients and healthcare professionals alike. While the technologies themselves are entirely new, the legal and moral principles by which they must be evaluated remain rooted in the exact same Qur'an, the same Sunnah, and the same juristic framework inherited from Imam Abu Hanifah.

It was this precise realization that originally inspired me to write my textbook, ***Imam Abu Hanifah: The Master of Qiyās***. That work was never intended merely as a dry historical study of one aspect of classical jurisprudence. Rather, it sought to actively demonstrate that the Imam's greatest contribution to Islamic civilization was the timeless methodological framework he established for addressing questions far beyond the immediate horizon of his own lifetime. I argued that ***qiyās***, when properly understood and exercised within its strictly recognized limits, remains one of the most powerful demonstrations of the absolute universality of Islamic law. Far from

representing innovation (***bidʿah***), it reflects the capacity of the Shari'ah to remain entirely faithful to revelation while masterfully addressing the realities of every age.

This understanding has profoundly dictated the way I approach every single book I have written. I have never viewed the act of publication as an end in itself, nor have I ever desired to produce books simply to increase my authorial volume. Every single project begins with an internal, burning question that I believe deserves a careful, traditional answer. Only when a question refuses to leave my mind do I begin asking whether it deserves to become a book. For this reason, none of my publications were conceived as isolated academic exercises. Each arose from what I believed to be a genuine, unmet need of the ***Ummah***—an attempt to return to the primary sources, examine the textual evidence carefully, and respond to the unique crises of our own age with absolute fidelity to the classical tradition.

The same philosophy guided my research into the hadith transmitted through Imam Abu Hanifah. Few issues have generated more deep misunderstanding than the Great Imam's relationship with the science of prophetic traditions. For generations, contemporary discussions have often been shaped far more by unverified repetition than by a careful, hands-on engagement with the available historical evidence. Assertive claims were frequently accepted at face value without returning directly to the original narrations themselves.

I therefore resolved to examine the evidence directly. This intensive process led to the compilation of ***Ṣaḥīḥ Musnad al-Imām al-Aʿẓam Abu Ḥanīfah***, bringing together authenticated narrations transmitted explicitly through Imam Abu Hanifah with detailed structural documentation, translation, and comprehensive commentary. My purpose was neither apologetic nor polemical. Rather, I wished to allow the narrations themselves to speak directly to the modern reader, enabling students to appreciate Imam Abu

Hanifah's rightful, high place within the broader hadith tradition through the clear evidence preserved by the classical masters of the science.

Questions of jurisprudence likewise continued to shape my recurring research. Observing the ongoing, recurring disagreements surrounding the Islamic lunar calendar encouraged me to revisit the classical Hanafi discussions concerning global moonsighting. Once again, the ultimate objective was not novelty or modern modification. I was not seeking to replace the inherited legal tradition, but to determine whether that traditional framework itself already contained robust solutions that had been overlooked or insufficiently appreciated within contemporary discussions.

The exact same pattern emerged in the realm of theology. My intensive study of Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi arose from a completely similar concern. Despite being universally recognized as one of the twin foundational theologians of ***Ahl al-Sunnah***, contemporary discussions frequently portrayed him primarily through the dry lens of later philosophical debates, completely overlooking the profoundly Qur'anic, deeply spiritual nature of his original methodology. I became increasingly convinced that Imam al-Maturidi deserved to be studied directly through his own classical writings and the wider Hanafi tradition rather than through inherited academic assumptions repeated over centuries.

That conviction ultimately led me to write ***Imam Maturidi: Architect of Islamic Creed***, an introduction to his life, thought, and enduring contribution to Sunni theology. My objective was not to engage in abstract, historical polemics, but to return the contemporary reader to a theological framework where intellect and revelation walk hand-in-hand, providing a stable anchorage for the modern soul navigating the storms of skepticism.

It has often been suggested that Imam Abu Hanifah and Imam al-Maturidi represented separate theological traditions, despite the profound, seamless continuity that exists between them. While Imam Abu Hanifah established the essential principles of Sunni creed in concise form, Imam al-Maturidi later

expanded and systematised those same principles in response to increasingly complex theological challenges. Returning to the primary texts convinced me that the relationship between these two towering scholars was far richer than is often acknowledged.

This realisation ultimately inspired ***Al-Fiqh al-Akbar and Kitab al-Tawhid: An Integrated Commentary on the Essential Teachings of Imam al-Aʿẓam Abu Hanifah and Imam al-Maturidi***. Rather than treating these works as isolated theological texts separated by geography and history, I sought to demonstrate the remarkable continuity that extends directly from Imam Abu Hanifah's foundational creed to Imam al-Maturidi's systematic exposition of Sunni theology. The project was never intended to introduce a new interpretation, but to clearly illustrate the organic, beautiful development of one continuous Hanafi-Maturidi intellectual tradition.

Modern debates surrounding the Divine Attributes (***al-Ṣifāt***) and anthropomorphism (***tashbīh***) have generated considerable confusion among everyday Muslims seeking to sincerely understand the traditional creed of ***Ahl al-Sunnah***. Contemporary discussions often become heavily dominated by loud slogans, aggressive accusations, and highly selective quotations, while the actual foundational works of the classical scholars remain largely unread in their original languages. Once again, I found myself returning to the earliest Hanafi and Maturidi authorities, asking not what later historical polemics claimed they taught, but what they themselves actually wrote with their own hands.

This cross-examination ultimately resulted in ***Allah Exists Without a Place: A Refutation of Anthropomorphism***, a work intended to present the classical, consensus Sunni understanding of Allah's absolute transcendence through the unyielding text of the Qur'an, the authentic Sunnah, and the explicit writings of the earliest generations of Hanafi and Maturidi masters.

Yet, all of these prior works, significant though they are to me personally, ultimately prepared me for the single massive project that has occupied the greatest, most demanding portion of my scholarly life: the translation and commentary of the ***Tafsīr al-Maturīdī***.

When I first encountered his masterwork, ***Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah***, I was immediately struck by both its extraordinary theological depth and its absolute relative inaccessibility to English-speaking readers. Here was one of the absolute undisputed masterpieces of Sunni Qur'anic exegesis, representing over a millennium of refined Hanafi-Maturidi scholarship, yet it remained virtually unknown outside those specific elite circles able to navigate the original Arabic manuscripts.

I began asking a deceptively simple question: *Why should one of the greatest treasures of our entire intellectual heritage remain fundamentally inaccessible to millions of English-speaking Muslims across the globe?*
That single question eventually grew into an expansive project that, by the ultimate will and decree of Allah, has become the absolute central scholarly undertaking of my life. Translating the ***Tafsīr al-Maturīdī*** has never been a simple exercise in mechanically rendering Arabic vocabulary into English prose. Every single page demands an exhaustive, careful engagement with classical Qur'anic language, prophetic traditions, intricate Hanafi jurisprudence, foundational Maturidi theology, complex Arabic linguistics, and the dense technical explanations of subsequent classical commentators. It is a monumental project measured not in transient months or university years, but strictly in decades of focus.

Like every single book that preceded it, however, it began with an honest question. That, perhaps, is the greatest, most enduring lesson I have inherited directly from Imam al-Aʿẓam Abu Hanifah.

The scholar does not begin with a self-serving desire to write a book. The scholar begins with a burning question.

Only afterwards come the silent years of intensive reading, the systematic comparison of ancient manuscripts, the meticulous consultation of classical commentaries, the exhausting drafting, the endless revision, and eventually—if Allah so wills—the formal publication.

Whether any of these monumental efforts ultimately prove beneficial to the world is not for me to judge. Like every single student of knowledge, I remain deeply conscious that my work is inherently limited by my own personal human shortcomings, and that whatever benefit these pages contain belongs entirely and exclusively to Allah. My simple hope has been to contribute, however modestly, to preserving, translating, and making accessible the extraordinary, beautiful intellectual heritage of the Hanafi-Maturidi tradition.

If these books continue to be read by sincere seekers long after I have returned to my Creator, I hope it will not be because they bear my name on the cover, but because they have helped readers rediscover the timeless, brilliant wisdom of Imam al-Aʿẓam Abu Hanifah, Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi, and the remarkable, unbroken chain of scholars who preserved their pristine legacy across more than thirteen centuries of human history.

Chapter Nine

A Personal Reflection

Throughout the pages of this book, I have reflected deeply upon the illustrative lives of Imam al-Aʿẓam Abu Hanifah, Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi, Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Imam al-Ghazali, Mawlana Jalal al-Din al-Rumi, and many of the other historical masters who preserved the rich intellectual and spiritual heritage of Islam. Their collective biographies demonstrate with absolute clarity that genuine scholarship is never merely the cold accumulation of information or the mechanical sorting of texts. Rather, it is an intense, lifelong spiritual discipline of internal sincerity, intellectual humility, patient endurance, and total service to Allah. Although separated from us by vast centuries of human history, their lived examples continue to fundamentally dictate and shape the way I understand my own personal responsibilities as a humble student of knowledge.

From the earliest, formative stages of my education, I came to deeply appreciate that authentic scholarship cannot exist without absolute intellectual honesty. Among those who most profoundly influenced my early academic development was my maternal uncle and teacher, **Professor Mohammad Hashim Kamali**. Through his extensive writings and close personal guidance, I learned that rigorous research requires a careful, unbiased engagement with textual evidence, an unyielding respect for differing scholastic opinions, and the raw moral courage to follow the strongest proof wherever it may lead. His distinguished career stands as a pristine demonstration of how a contemporary scholar can actively engage modern challenges while remaining firmly rooted in the classical Islamic tradition.

Alongside these contemporary academic influences, I found myself increasingly drawn to the classical Hanafi-Maturidi heritage preserved so

meticulously in the modern era by the late Ottoman polymath, Shaykh al-Islam **Imam Muhammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī**. His profound writings introduced me to an extraordinary combination of sharp, critical textual scholarship, an unyielding reverence for the classical tradition, and an unwavering state of intellectual integrity. Through his works, I came to appreciate not merely the final legal conclusions reached by the Hanafi masters, but the highly disciplined, internal methodology by which those conclusions had been systematically extracted. His immense influence encouraged me to bypass popular summaries and modern shortcuts, returning continually to the raw primary sources to examine the evidence firsthand.

As the years passed, I gradually discovered that the specific work which brought me the greatest internal fulfillment was neither the public platform of oratory nor the administrative complexities of institutional leadership, but the quiet, solitary study of classical texts. There is a unique, incomparable tranquility in sitting entirely alone with an Arabic manuscript, systematically comparing ancient commentaries, tracing the brilliant legal reasoning of Imam Abu Hanifah through successive generations of jurists, or following Imam al-Maturidi's profound discussion of a single Qur'anic verse across multiple volumes. Such work moves forward with painstaking slowness. Entire days may be spent resolving a single difficult linguistic passage or a complex theological knot, yet those quiet, unseen hours have become among the happiest, most spiritually rewarding moments of my entire life.

My everyday profession as a medical practitioner has also quietly shaped my understanding of sacred knowledge in unexpected ways. The practice of clinical medicine acts as a perpetual reminder of the strict limitations of human understanding. Every single patient is a unique reality. Every complex diagnosis demands profound humility. Every treatment plan carries its own inherent weight of earthly uncertainty. This daily clinical experience has continuously reinforced an essential spiritual lesson: absolute certainty belongs to Allah alone. The more deeply one studies—whether it be the

intricate anatomy of the human body or the subtle definitions of classical theology—the more profoundly one realizes the sheer, staggering vastness of what remains unknown to the human mind.

Perhaps for that specific reason, I have never regarded the pursuit of scholarship as a vehicle for achieving worldly recognition or temporal status. Books, lectures, and publications inevitably fade with the turning of generations, while personal reputations are rapidly forgotten by the tides of time. If any lasting, objective value exists within our written work, it lies entirely and exclusively in the extent to which it sincerely benefits others for the sake of Allah. Every single book I have written has therefore been offered with a simple, singular intention: to preserve, however modestly, some small portion of the extraordinary intellectual heritage entrusted to our care by the giants who came before us.

This identical conviction has completely shaped my commitment to open-access publishing. Throughout my own private studies, I benefited enormously from the timeless labor of scholars who selflessly devoted their lives to preserving and sharing knowledge without expectation of return. Wherever possible, I have sought to continue that prophetic tradition by making my own research freely available to the global ***Ummah***. Knowledge is a sacred ***amānah***, and wherever Allah grants us the independent means to completely remove material barriers between a sincere student and beneficial knowledge, we should regard that opportunity as an immense blessing rather than a personal sacrifice.

Alongside academic scholarship, I have also come to appreciate more deeply the vital necessity of structured spiritual refinement. The greatest scholars of our traditional lineage never separated academic knowledge from the systematic purification of the heart. Jurisprudence (***fiqh***) teaches us how to worship correctly; theology (***ʿaqīdah***) teaches us what to believe with clarity; spiritual path (***taṣawwuf***) teaches us to worship Allah with absolute

sincerity, humility, and excellence (***iḥsān***). For this reason, my close connection with the **Naqshbandi Kawthari** tradition has never represented a departure from academic scholarship, but rather its natural, necessary completion. Knowledge illuminates the analytical mind, while the constant remembrance (***dhikr***) of Allah purifies the vessel of the heart. The true believer requires both.

Among the historical scholars whose writings continue to inspire me personally, **Mawlana Jalal al-Din al-Rumi** occupies a highly unique and special place. According to my family's documented genealogy, both our lineages ultimately trace back to the first Caliph of Islam, **Sayyiduna Abu Bakr al-Siddīq** (RA), through his great-grandson **Hazrat Mutahhar** (from which my family derives the surname **Mutahar)** and his descendant **Thabit**. This ancestral line originally settled in Balkh, Afghanistan, before later branches migrated westward to settle in the famous city of Konya.

While such historical ancestry is an immense blessing for which I thank Allah daily, I have never regarded it as a cause for self-congratulation or personal distinction. True honor lies not in whom one physically descends from, but in striving to actively emulate the internal sincerity, deep humility, and absolute devotion that characterized those righteous predecessors. Lineage is not a badge of pride; it is a heavy debt of character that must be paid daily.

As I look towards the future, I remain deeply conscious that my own small contribution is but a single thread within a magnificent, expansive tapestry woven over more than fourteen centuries of Islamic history. The illustrious scholars whose names fill the chapters of this book preserved a sacred inheritance that none of us owns. We merely carry it for a brief, transient moment in time before passing it faithfully to those who come after us.

If my books encourage even a small number of readers to return to the texts of Imam Abu Hanifah, Imam al-Maturidi, Imam al-Kawthari, and the wider treasures of our school, then I shall consider every single hour spent in

isolation with manuscript, pen, and paper to have been richly rewarded. Whatever benefit they contain belongs entirely and exclusively to Allah; whatever shortcomings or mistakes remain are entirely my own. I ask Allah to accept these humble efforts, forgive my many oversights, and allow this work to serve as a small contribution to the preservation of the intellectual and spiritual legacy of ***Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāʿah***.

Chapter Ten

Carrying the Legacy Forward

Every single generation naturally inherits the profound blessings and heavy structural responsibilities of those who came before it. The master scholars of our past painstakingly preserved the textual purity of the Qur'an, transmitted the *Sunnah*, refined the intricate principles of jurisprudence, defended the orthodox creed of ***Ahl al-Sunnah***, and left behind an intellectual and spiritual legacy that continues to illuminate the path of everyday Muslims throughout the globe. That legacy was never intended by its creators to remain permanently confined to the passive pages of history. Rather, every subsequent generation receives it as an active ***amānah***—a sacred, living trust to preserve with absolute fidelity, enrich through sincere personal effort, and pass on unadulterated to those who follow.

As I reflect deeply upon the parameters of my own journey, I remain acutely conscious that the vast majority of the work still lies directly ahead of my pen. Whatever I have been enabled to contribute thus far represents only a microscopic effort within a tradition spanning more than fourteen centuries. If Allah grants me life, continued health, and internal sincerity, I hope to actively serve the Hanafi-Maturidi tradition for as long as He wills, preserving its rich intellectual heritage while making its foundational texts increasingly accessible to English-speaking Muslims.

Foremost among these active commitments is the ongoing translation and comprehensive commentary of the ***Tafsīr al-Maturīdī*** (***Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah***). Spanning an anticipated completed reality of tens of thousands of pages, this project stands as one of the largest English-language undertakings ever devoted to a single classical Qur'anic commentary in human history. To sustain this rigorous research, translation, and text-critical commentary across multiple decades requires an unyielding level of daily focus. Whether I

live to physically see its final volume printed rests entirely and exclusively with the decree of Allah. My daily prayer is simply that each completed volume preserves another vital portion of Imam al-Maturidi's extraordinary legacy, placing it safely within reach of future generations of students and researchers.

Beyond this massive, central undertaking, there remain many other distinct areas in which I hope to contribute to the ***Ummah***. Although the vast majority of my published catalog has focused explicitly upon the Hanafi-Maturidi tradition, Qur'anic exegesis, theology, and traditional jurisprudence, I have also completed several comprehensive manuscripts and undertaken intensive research in contemporary fields that currently remain unpublished. These extensive writings include specialized studies in Islamic economics, inter-community dialogue, public welfare, and strategic peacebuilding frameworks. If Allah grants me the temporal opportunity, I intend to meticulously revise and publish these works gradually in the years ahead. My lifelong academic aspiration has always been to demonstrate that the classical Islamic tradition possesses both the empirical depth and the timeless, universal guidance necessary to address the highly specific, complex socio-political challenges of our modern age.

In the unfolding years ahead, I also intend to devote increasing energy and focus to the preservation of the inner sciences of ***taṣawwuf***, ***iḥsān***, and ***tazkiyat al-nafs***. The careful preservation of orthodox Sunni spirituality is no less critical to the survival of the faith than the preservation of law and creed; for knowledge that does not fundamentally transform the vessel of the heart remains dangerously incomplete. The greatest classical masters of ***Ahl al-Sunnah*** never regarded jurisprudence, theology, and spiritual refinement as competing or adversarial disciplines, but rather as deeply complementary, nesting sciences through which the believer simultaneously perfects both outward physical obedience and inward spiritual sincerity.

By the grace of Allah, I remain committed to continuing the legacy of the **Naqshbandi Kawthari** path, striving to preserve its scholarly and spiritual inheritance and to transmit it faithfully to those who come after us. The **Naqshbandi Kawthari** tradition is a noble branch of the historical **Naqshbandi Khalidi** lineage, whose scholarly and spiritual chain passes through the final great luminary of the Ottoman tradition, Shaykh al-Islam Imam Muhammad Zahid al-Kawthari—who inherited this spiritual authority directly from his venerable father, **Imam Hasan Hilmi**—and the distinguished Syrian masters who faithfully preserved and transmitted his unmatched legacy after him. To remain connected to this noble ***silsilah*** is both a profound honour and a tremendous responsibility. It is not a new path, but the continuation of a living scholarly and spiritual tradition whose inheritance has been entrusted to each generation in turn.

What drew me closest to this specific path was a profound realization that matured over years of intensive study. Learning the external legal boundaries of jurisprudence (***fiqh***) and the structured formulations of theology (***ʿaqīdah***), by themselves, is simply not enough. Without the animating spirit of internal refinement, the academic pursuit of these sciences can inadvertently devolve into a rigid, robotic mechanism—an intellectual exercise devoid of life. It is the station of ***iḥsān*** (spiritual excellence) that unlocks an entirely different level of internal peace, deep soul-centric tranquility, and connection to the Divine.

Because I was already heavily invested in the text-critical Hanafi-Maturidi lineage, the rich legacy of the Ottoman Empire, and the defense of orthodoxy championed by Imam Muhammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī, entering this unbroken chain felt entirely natural. It was not a sudden departure, but a home-coming.

What pursued me, and what ultimately captured my heart, was the uncompromisingly genuine orthodoxy of this path. It is a deeply scholarly, quiet, and reflective lineage characterized by its commitment to silent

remembrance (***dhikr-i khafī***). Unlike many contemporary organizations that aggressively seek rapid operational expansion, public prominence, or digital popularity, the **Naqshbandi Kawthari** tradition has never measured its success by the volume of those who offer pledge (***bayʿah***). In fact, it is the exact opposite. It refuses to engage in superficial text-based initiations or far-fetched pledges, nor does it seek validation through mass gatherings or public displays. It does not compromise ***fiqh*** for the sake of mass appeal.

Instead, it remains a highly limited, exclusive path intended strictly for serious, grounded individuals and dedicated students of knowledge who wish to combine rigorous academic text-study with authentic purification of the heart, while maintaining an uncompromised connection to the majestic Ottoman scholarly tradition. It was with this explicit understanding that my own honorable Shaykh strictly advised me to continue the legacy of Imam Muhammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī in our modern contemporary age—a time that undoubtedly needs this balanced, unyielding standard of scholarship and spirituality most.

Imam Muhammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī stands historically among the final great giants of the traditional Ottoman university system—a peerless Hanafi jurist, a definitive Maturidi theologian, a masterful *ḥadīth* authority, and one of the great spiritual renewers (***mujaddidīn***) of the modern era. His extensive writings continue to beautifully demonstrate a remarkable synthesis of rigorous text-critical scholarship, unwavering orthodoxy, complete intellectual independence, and profound spiritual refinement. To remain connected to his legacy is to remain anchored to one of the last great, uncompromising lights of classical Islamic civilisation.

This highly focused methodology reflects a long-standing, fundamental principle within the classical Islamic scholarly tradition: that the spiritual and intellectual quality of those who carry knowledge is infinitely more critical than the sheer numerical quantity of those who merely claim a passive affiliation. A single, genuinely sincere scholar who is firmly grounded in the

text-critical methodology of ***Ahl al-Sunnah*** may single-handedly preserve an entire intellectual tradition for generations to come. The history of Islam repeatedly demonstrates that lasting, transformative influence has seldom been achieved through raw numbers alone, but through absolute internal sincerity, flawless scholarship, and the divine blessing (***barakah***) that Allah places exclusively in the quiet efforts of His righteous servants.

In many profound respects, this modern approach directly mirrors the classical example of Imam al-Aʿẓam Abu Hanifah himself. Although thousands of individuals benefited from his public teaching circles throughout his lifetime in Kufah, it was a relatively small, elite number of exceptional students who carried his exact systemic methodology to future generations. Among them, his primary companions—Imam Abu Yusuf and Imam Muhammad al-Shaybānī—systematically preserved, codified, and expanded the legal principles they had inherited from their master. Through their unyielding dedication, the Hanafi school spread dynamically far beyond the borders of Iraq, eventually becoming the most widely followed school of Islamic jurisprudence on earth.

Their historical example serves as a perpetual lesson to the modern world that the true strength of a scholarly tradition is never measured by the size of its audience or the volume of its acclaim, but by the intellectual and spiritual caliber of the individuals it produces. The greatest teachers of our past never sought to gather the largest, most uncritical crowds; rather, they sought to carefully cultivate deeply sincere students whose foundational knowledge would actively benefit the world long after their own passing. History selectively remembers those who faithfully guarded the sacred ***amānah*** of knowledge, while rapidly forgetting those who merely accumulated followers.

This unchanging principle continues to dictate my own understanding of contemporary scholarship and service. Ultimately, this has always been the definitive lesson I have drawn from the magnificent life of Imam al-Aʿẓam Abu Hanifah. His enduring legacy was never built upon material wealth,

political alignment, or popular acclaim, but upon an unwavering, absolute devotion to the truth, unyielding intellectual integrity, total independence of thought, and the meticulous cultivation of students who carried his traditional voice to the absolute ends of the earth. More than thirteen centuries after his physical passing, his influence remains dynamically alive because he invested not in fleeting worldly success, but in knowledge that continued to benefit humanity for generations.

As I look towards the future, my own aspirations remain entirely modest. I do not know how many of my ongoing textual projects will ultimately reach physical completion, nor do I know how many temporal years Allah has written for my life on this earth. My fundamental responsibility is simply to strive daily with internal sincerity, to preserve what I have inherited to the absolute best of my human ability, and to leave whatever benefit Allah permits for those who come after me. The ultimate outcome belongs entirely and exclusively to Him, for He alone grants acceptance and causes knowledge to endure.

Conclusion

The monumental legacy of Imam al-Aʿẓam Abu Hanifah did not end with his physical passing in a Baghdad prison. It continued dynamically across the centuries through his direct students, through the successive generations of scholars who preserved and refined his systemic methodology, and through every researcher who remained fiercely faithful to the text of the Qur'an, the *Sunnah*, and the foundational principles upon which he constructed his school. The exact same may be said of Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi, whose profound defense of orthodox Sunni theology continues to illuminate the path of **Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāʿah** more than a thousand years after his death, and of Shaykh al-Islam Imam Muhammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī, whose text-critical scholarship safeguarded the Hanafi-Maturidi tradition during one of the most turbulent, unstable periods in modern Islamic history.

When we reflect upon their lives, a profound historical paradox becomes apparent. The temporal rulers, caliphs, and state courts that sought to co-opt, censor, or imprison these giants have long since dissolved into the dust of history; their political decrees are entirely forgotten. Yet, the intellectual independence of Imam Abu Hanifah and the patient, quiet scholarship of Imam al-Maturidi continue to shape the daily prayers, legal verdicts, and core theological creed of hundreds of millions of believers across the globe. By choosing the lonely pursuit of truth over the immediate safety of state patronage, they proved that true scholastic authority is never granted by a royal decree or institutional appointment, but is blessed exclusively by Allah when a scholar guards the purity of knowledge.

Every single generation inherits this sacred trust for only a brief, transient moment in time before returning it to Allah. Our collective responsibility is neither to artificially reinvent the tradition to suit modern secular whims, nor to seek personal recognition through it, but to preserve it with absolute

fidelity, benefit from its truths sincerely, and transmit it entirely intact to those whom Allah has chosen to come after us.

By the infinite grace and mercy of Allah, I hope to spend the remaining days of my life contributing, however modestly, to that exact same sacred inheritance. Whether through the continued, intensive translation of the **Tafsīr al-Maturīdī**, the gradual publication of future manuscripts, or the quiet preservation of our traditional scholarly and spiritual path, my aspiration is simply to serve as another microscopic link in an unbroken, majestic chain. It is a chain that stretches back through the great Hanafi masters to Imam al-Maturidi's rational defenses, to the legal bravery of Imam al-Aʿẓam Abu Hanifah himself, and ultimately to the fountainhead of all guidance, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

This lifelong dedication directly aligns with the prophetic parameters of enduring service. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

"When the son of Adam dies, his deeds come to an end except for three: ongoing charity, beneficial knowledge, or a righteous child who prays for him."
— Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim

Every book we write, every single student we instruct, every heart we quietly guide towards Allah, and every authentic tradition we protect carries the profound hope that it may continue to benefit others long after we have returned to our Creator. This is the true, unadulterated meaning of legacy—not a fleeting worldly fame that rapidly fades with time, but beneficial knowledge, sincere action, and righteous deeds that continue to bear fruit across generations by the permission of Allah.

Allah Most High beautifully and definitively summarizes the ultimate purpose of this entire lifelong intellectual and spiritual endeavor:

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ تَزَكَّىٰ

"He has certainly succeeded who purifies himself."
— Surah al-Aʿlā, 87:14

May Allah make us among those who relentlessly seek beneficial knowledge, act upon its dictates with absolute sincerity, continually purify our hearts through obedience to Him, preserve the sacred trust of the classical scholars who came before us, and faithfully pass that trust to those who come after us. May He accept every sincere effort made in His cause, forgive our many human shortcomings, and unite us with the Prophets, the truthful, the martyrs, and the righteous in the highest ranks of Paradise. **Āmīn**.